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C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 000035

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIA: UPDATE ON CLAIMS OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

REF: YEREVAN 19

Classified By: DCM A.F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) We reported reftel our initial investigation of an allegation of religious persecution in Armenia's armed forces. On January 11, we spoke with Levon Margaryan, Deputy Board Member of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Armenia, about the recent media claims that Armen Grigoryan was abused while serving in the Armenian army. Margaryan stated that he serves as Grigoryan's lawyer in the case. Margaryan confirmed that Grigoryan was not a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses nor was he on the way to becoming a member. According to Margaryan, Grigoryan claimed he did not receive his draft notice in May 2004. In June Grigoryan was called by a military official and asked to report for a physical examination. (Note: Unless the Ministry of Defense has granted them a deferment, Armenian men are drafted during the recruitment cycle immediately after their 18th birthday. For Grigoryan, this would have been May 2004. Reporting for an army physical before receiving a draft notice would be highly unusual. End Note.) Margaryan reported that Grigoryan claimed to be quite surprised when he was taken from the doctor's office and sent to join recruits in Karabakh. According to the lawyer, Grigoryan declared his conscientious objection to military service for the first time after arriving in Karabakh.

12. (C) Margaryan stated that Grigoryan was not kept under guard and not forced to participate in military exercises while with the military unit. During a visit by Margaryan and Grigoryan's father, the commanding officer allowed Grigoryan to leave the base with them for lunch. According to Margaryan, a regional military investigator reported to him that he had hit Grigoryan in order to "bring him up right," but Margaryan also stated that Grigoryan's direct supervisor intervened on several occasions to prevent abuse. Grigoryan's lawyer alleged that when Grigoryan's commanding officer went on vacation, the abuse increased and Grigoryan left his unit without leave. Grigoryan is currently in hiding.

13. (C) Margaryan stated that no Jehovah's Witness members have been forced into the army in recent memory, but that nine remained in prison as conscientious objectors despite the newly adopted law on Alternatives to Military Service.

14. (C) This information authoritatively discredits allegations made by the Norwegian NGO "Forum 18." While the hazing described in paragraph 2 above is certainly objectionable, it is, unfortunately, common for recruits in post-Soviet armed forces.

EVANS